Activities and short breaks for disabled children in Herefordshire 2017-2020 consultation

Herefordshire Council has a duty to ensure there is a sufficient range of short break services available to meet the assessed needs of disabled children and their carers in the county. We do this through the ‘short breaks offer’.

The current funding for our short breaks offer comes to an end in March 2017 and the council is leading a re-commissioning project for short breaks activities for the period 2017 to 2020. As in other areas of the country, Herefordshire’s short breaks offer has evolved over recent years, with most families being supported by appropriate community based activities.

We continue to listen to families of disabled children, service providers and other professionals about how the local short breaks offer should further evolve.

There are three levels of service that can offer a short break:

**Universal:** These are everyday community services that are accessible without an assessment such as youth clubs, after school activities, uniformed groups (i.e. Cubs, Brownies), leisure centres, nurseries, childminders and activity-based groups. These are not paid for by the council but form part of valuable experiences for children and young people.

**Targeted:** Specific daytime activities for disabled children that families can self-refer to. Some of these services will be paid for by the council.

**Specialist:** Short break daytime or overnight services designed to meet a specific need following a social care assessment of an individual child and their carers.

Re-commissioning short breaks will need to balance the views of families and other stakeholders with local needs, statutory duties and available resources. The key principle is to provide valuable support for families and there are several options for improving the local short breaks offer, each of which has potential advantages or disadvantages.

As part of this consultation, we welcome your views as they will further inform different options for 2017-2020. The consultation will be available until **Wednesday 31 August 2016** and the council will also be attending a series of events over the summer, so please come along for a chat to discuss short breaks in more detail. The event information is published on our website at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/shortbreaks](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/shortbreaks).

The following pages provide useful information about what is needed in Herefordshire, and the options that could be considered to meet local need. Having looked at the information, you can have your say by taking part in a consultation survey by following the link at the end of this document.
Informing the 2017-2020 short breaks offer

What have families already told us?

- Short breaks are achieving good outcomes for most children and families
- Children take part in interesting activities and become more independent or confident
- Getting to know other families can help, but it isn’t the main aim of a short break
- Most families feel that their child have fun with carers who understood their needs
- Families want more and cheaper breaks, offering socialisation, consistency and choice
- Organising and spending direct payments needs to be made easier
- Most children prefer to do things with their friends or in organised groups
- Many families would prefer to choose from a selection of approved providers
- Most families want to be kept informed about short breaks in Herefordshire
- Better communication is needed about the range of available short breaks
- Value for money is an important factor
- Stability and long term planning are important

What is the local need and options for meeting it?

Universal and community daytime activities: There are a wide range of universal and community activities available in the county. Word of mouth and local promotion is how many of these activities are accessed. There will be information on these short break opportunities on the WISH website, which was launched in January 2016, with additional information being added as it develops.

Families and professionals have suggested that more could be done to increase the availability and information about universal and community activities for disabled children. The possible options could be to provide practical support to activity providers to:

- Develop their ability to offer inclusive opportunities for disabled children
- Assure their quality
- Promote their availability

Targeted open access daytime activities: These services include activities designed specifically for disabled children, such as holiday clubs. As these services are available without a professional assessment, there is limited data available to forecast future need. However, the current play sessions contract, delivered by Marches Family Network, has been fully utilised each year by around 70 children.

There have been some significant variations in individual take up, ranging from less than 10 to over 100 hours per child per year. In recent childcare sufficiency and short breaks surveys, families have said that more opportunities and longer sessions are needed, particularly during the school holidays and weekend. The possible options include:

- Investing in additional services at this level to provide more opportunities and greater choice
Developing a system that improves the targeting services to meet need. For example, other areas have eligibility criteria for some daytime short breaks based on special educational needs assessments.

**Specialist short break services:** These can be provided to meet a specific need following a social care assessment of a child’s and carer’s needs. As a rural county with a relatively small population, Herefordshire has low numbers of disabled children with a wide range of needs, which makes it more challenging to offer a flexible range of sustainable services. Depending on the outcome of a child’s assessment, needs could be met through a range of services, including:

- Direct payments that families can use to employ a personal assistant
- Specialist daytime activities, such as 1:1 buddying
- Specialist family-based overnight short breaks
- Specialist residential-based overnight short breaks

**Direct payments:** Increasing numbers of families are choosing the direct payment option instead of a commissioned service to meet their assessed needs. However, the traditional use of block contracts for commissioned services, which tie funding to provider organisations for a fixed period, means that resources may not follow the choices of a child or their family.

One option could be to move towards more flexible contracting arrangements for 2017-2020. This could increase the number of providers in the short breaks offer, offering better choice between commissioned services and direct payments. However, it could reduce a provider’s financial security if they have previously been reliant on contract funding.

**Specialist daytime activities:** We expect to need between 6,000 and 7,000 hours each year for 35 to 45 children, with the options to consider including:

- Most families have valued the current specialist 1:1 buddying service model, delivered by Core Assets and Crossroads Care, but would like more socialisation opportunities for their children with friends and peers
- In its review of the short breaks offer in December 2015, the health and social care overview and scrutiny committee task and finish group, recommended that the council should consider direct delivery of specialist buddying services instead of delivery by an external provider

**Specialist family-based overnight short breaks:** The council is establishing the specialist family-based overnight short breaks service in 2016, delivered by its in-house fostering service. Carer recruitment is progressing well and the first short breaks placements have begun. By 2019/20, around 900 nights are expected to be needed for 15 to 20 children each year. As this is a new approach in Herefordshire, it is not proposed that the service is included in the procurement exercise for 2017-2020.

**Specialist residential-based overnight short breaks:** We expect to need between 600 and 700 nights for between 10 and 15 children each year. For 2017/18, this total includes around 250 nights for children who have already been provided for through individualised arrangements. Children can have a combination of health, physical and behavioural needs.

The options include:

- Purchase all nights from a single provider, which would give provider organisations some financial security, but could restrict opportunities for matching a child’s assessed need to an appropriate service
- Purchase nights from a range of providers, which could offer better matches for children and more choice for families, but would mean providers
need a range of income sources to remain sustainable

Next steps

Subject to formal decisions to be taken by the council and Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) about funding for short breaks after March 2017, the re-commissioning timetable will be:

- **Mid September:** Publish six week procurement exercise for organisations to submit bids to become providers in the 2017-2020 short breaks offer
- **November:** Evaluation of service provider bids
- **December:** Confirm intention to award contracts and standstill period
- **January - March 2017:** Contract mobilisation: Providers will prepare for delivery, as well as working with the council and families that may be affected by service changes. The council will also identify any remaining service gaps during this period and, if necessary, develop options for meeting assessed need in other ways with individual or groups of families as appropriate

Have your say

To have your say, please complete the [activities and short breaks for disabled children in Herefordshire 2017-2020 consultation](https://example.com/consultation).